

## IF ALL ELSE FAILS - JUST REMEMBER

The **A. D. A. M.** principle

Your compost is :

**A.LIVE:** it contains millions of living microorganisms

**D.IVERSE:** the more different things you put in the better it will do. Feeding your compost is the Key

**A.IR:** the key to no smells & flies

**M.OISTURE:** successful compost needs moisture



**All compost contains micro organisms such as fungi and bacteria.  
Do not inhale compost directly. Always wash your hands after handling compost.**

**KEEP COMPOST IN THE GARDEN  
AND OUT OF THE LANDFILL**

## Garden Composting Guidelines



**'Let's Rot it all away'**

## Introduction

Making compost from garden and kitchen scraps is one of the best things you can do - it's easy. Your soil will be healthier, plants happier and you will have helped to lengthen the life of the landfill.



## What can I compost?

**If it can rot, it will compost** although some items are best avoided altogether.

## Activators or “hotter rotters”

Materials such as grass clippings, veggie scraps, soft weeds, flowers, banana skins, apple cores, rot quickly and get the compost started. But if composted on their own will rot to a smelly mess.



## Older and tougher plant material is slower to rot.

They usually make up the bulk of the compost heap and decay very slowly. Materials such as twigs, leaves, woody cabbage stems, shredded newspaper, straw, and cereal boxes are best chopped or mulched using the lawn mower first.



## For best results use an EQUAL mixture of both types of ingredients.

## Do NOT compost

Coal ash  
Cat litter  
Dog faeces  
Disposable nappies  
Glossy magazines



## Hints and Tips - Animal manures

Small pets like hamsters produce small amounts of strawy waste that can be added to the compost bin. Guinea pigs love eating weeds and convert them to prime material for composting.

## Solving the problem

### A quick guide



| Problem                           | Reason                                              | More clues                                                        | Remedy                                              |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Composting is not happening       | Materials too dry or large amount of woody material | Materials feel dry & dusty                                        | Add water and mix or add some 'activators' or both  |
| Compost is soggy                  | Materials too wet                                   | Materials feel soggy, can squeeze out water drops                 | Add dry materials & remix                           |
| Compost not heating up            | Not enough 'hot rotter' activators                  | Large amount of woody materials                                   | Add activators such as grass clippings              |
| Odours in bin                     | Poorly mixed materials or wrong type of materials   | Areas of all one type of material or lots of soft green materials | Remix materials or add woody materials, sawdust     |
| Bin does not reheat after turning | Compost nearing completion                          | Material dark in colour                                           | None required                                       |
| Flies and other pests are present | Wrong food scraps i.e. meat, bread egg, cheese      | Food scraps lying exposed on top of heap                          | Bury exposed food scraps. Remove items such as meat |

## Composting Ingredients

### Do I need a shredder to make compost?

No. It can be useful if you have a lot of woody material but a mulcher lawn mower is just as good.

### Does the time of year make a difference?

Yes. The material composts faster in the summer than in the winter.



### Does it matter if the compost is coarse?

No. You can sieve it through some chicken wire over a wheel barrow before using. Any stalky or woody material that is removed can be recycled into the next bin.

### Will I see worms in the compost?

You are more likely to see worms in the cool compost bin as worms do not like temperatures above 30 C. Therefore with the hot heap method they will tend to appear as the bin cools and the compost matures.

### How does the composting process work?

The formation of compost is a natural, but an extremely complex biochemical process in which proteins, fats and carbohydrates of materials are decomposed by a very diverse and vast army of bacteria and fungi, which transform the compost into a living fertiliser.

### What about Carbon to Nitrogen Ratio?

Only really for keen composters but not essential. Just try and keep an equal mix of woody material to 'activators' plus a good supply of moisture.

It is useful to know, that the composting microorganisms use the carbon available in the woody materials for energy and the nitrogen in 'activators' for growth and reproduction to maintain their population.



### Activators "Hotter Rotters"

Grass Cuttings  
Young weeds

Old flowers  
Bedding plants  
Perennial weeds

Animal manures

Fruit and veggie scraps

Soft prunings



### Slow Rotters

Wood & woody prunings

Autumn leaves,  
Woody veggie remains

Old straw & hay

Sawdust & shavings

Hedge clippings



### Other Compostable Items

Wood ash

Cardboard  
Paper towels

Newspaper  
Paper bags

Egg boxes



### Best Avoided

Meat  
Fish

Weed seeds  
Diseased plant material

Dairy products  
Eggs

Bread and cakes  
Sauces.

## Hints and Tips - Ingredients

### Autumn leaves

Try storing some dry leaves mixed with grass clippings and other soft green stuff in wire mesh containers to make leaf mould. Mow leaves on the lawn and then collect them up.



### Grass clippings

Mix well with tougher items to avoid a slimy mess. Leave on the lawn whenever possible - clippings will soon disappear and feed the grass; this will not cause 'thatch.' They can also be mixed into a leaf mould heap or used as a mulch.



### Evergreen hedge clippings and prunings

Chop or shred tough prunings and clippings from evergreen hedges before adding to a mixed compost bin. If you have space, compost large quantities separately. Mix the chopped material with grass clippings or other green 'activators', water well. Tread down the heap and cover. Leave for up to a year, then use as a coarse mulch on perennial and shrub beds.



### Paper products

Shredded newspaper can go into compost heaps but large quantities should go for paper recycling. Cardboard, paper towels, and other paper items can be scrunched up and composted. They are particularly useful where kitchen scraps make up a high proportion of the composting materials. Avoid glossy paper.



### Sawdust and wood shavings

Both are very slow to decay so use them in small quantities and balance with quick to rot materials. Do not use if treated with wood preservatives.

### Will the compost smell?

Well mixed compost will have a small but not unpleasant smell. Strong and unpleasant odours usually result from mistakes; like composting grass clippings on their own, adding too many kitchen scraps or the wrong type of foods. Bad smells will also occur if the heap becomes too wet or has too little air.

### Will the compost heap attract animal and pests?

Adding food to compost will make it more attractive to pests. An enclosed bin is the best solution. Adding stale beer or soft drinks will increase flies and ants.



### What should I do if the compost has a bad smell?

Turn or mix the contents of the bin immediately and check to see if the compost is soggy. If so add some dry materials such as shredded newspaper.



### Do I need any special equipment?

A compost bin is ideal to protect the compost from rain. If composting without a bin the compost heap needs to be at least a cubic metre or more and should be covered with old carpet or a polythene sheet. A garden fork is also essential.



### Does a compost heap have to get hot?

No. Compost can heat up to 70C in a few days. The heat helps to make compost quicker, and to kill weed seeds and diseases. But your compost may never heat up especially if it is made over a long period.

### Does compost spread weeds and diseases?

Some weed seeds and plant diseases will survive in slow cool compost - best to avoid adding them in altogether.

When the bucket is full, go to the garden, and dig a suitable sized hole, at least a spade depth deep. Add the bucket contents and cover with soil. Leave for up to 2 - 3 months before planting over the top. This is a very useful method in the veggie garden. When harvesting, any unwanted veggie material can be buried directly in between the rows.

## Composting questions answered

### Compost is?

Compost is quite different from the material it was made from. Compost looks like dark soil, free from unpleasant odours, and stores for a long time. It is good for improving the condition of the soil.

### Do I have to be an expert to make compost?

No. composting just happens - its nature's way of cleaning up the garden. Composting merely controls those conditions so that materials decompose faster.

### Is it a lot of work?

Making compost can be as easy as burying lawn clippings or kitchen scraps or making a compost heap. The amount of time and effort you put into it is up to you.

### How long does it take?

Compost can be made in 8 to 12 weeks, or it can take a year or more. In general, the more effort you put in, the quicker you will get compost.

### Do I need to add lime or fertilisers?

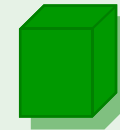
Adding fertilisers to a bin is expensive. Lime is not required for composting as it causes any nitrogen present to be lost as a gas. Mature compost is nearly always near a neutral pH. The only time you may need to add Nitrogen fertiliser to a bin is when you are composting just leaves. Best fertilisers to use are either an animal manure or dried blood.

## Which way to go?

You can make compost, simply by adding compostable items to a heap when you feel like it. But it may take a long time to rot and could smell.

With a little extra attention you can improve things dramatically by following any of the routes below:

The **COOL** heap way



### Getting started

On the West coast, it is better to make the compost in a bin or container, with a lid to protect it from the rain. You can make these yourself from:

- old pallets,
- old tin sheets,
- netting or mesh wrapped around stakes and lined with cardboard to retain heat.

Alternatively a number of commercial bins are available.

### Finding the right place

Locate the bin in a sheltered, level area of the garden, that has good drainage if standing directly on the soil, and easy access. The site should preferably be in a protected area, not in full sun and within reach of a garden hose.

### Lets make compost

- Collect together a batch of compost materials. Weed the garden, mow the lawn, empty the kitchen bucket. Aim for an equal mix of soft activating material and slower tougher woody items.
- Place a few woody stems, twigs, fern fronds on the bottom first to help air flow and drainage.

- Start filling the bin. Spread the ingredients out to the edges and firm down gently. It is best to start the bin with a bigger batch and fill it to a depth of 30-60 cm. Mix all the items together and add water if required. Continue to fill the container. Items can be added individually but bigger batches are best. If most of what you compost is kitchen scraps or grass clippings be sure to mix it with egg boxes, shredded newspaper, toilet roll centres etc.
- Keep mixing new material together. If it is too dry add water, too wet add dry material such as newspaper. When the container is full - which it may never be as the contents sink as it composts - or when you decide to stop adding to it, leave it to finish composting.

## The **Hot** heap way



- Gather enough material to fill your compost bin in ONE go, making sure you have a mixture of soft and tough materials. Mix them altogether well, like making a giant stew and fill the container as before, adding water as required.
- Within a few days the heap is likely to get hot to the touch. When it begins to cool, turn the heap. Either lift the container off and remix or stir around in the bin trying to get the outside to the inside. Add water if it is dry, or dry material if it is too wet.

### Tip

The compost needs to be moist so as to feel like a squeezed out sponge. If it becomes too wet valuable Nitrogen will be leached out and lost.

- The heap may well heat up again; Mixing and stirring your heap can be repeated several more times if you have time, but the heating will get less and less. When it no longer heats up leave it undisturbed to finish composting.

### When is it ready?

Compost can be ready in 8 - 12 weeks if following the hot composting route, or it can take up to a year. In general, the more effort you put in, the quicker you will compost. When the ingredients you have put into the container have changed into a soil like material, the composting process is complete. Don't worry if the compost is not fine or crumbly, and has bits of twigs etc. It is still quite useable.



### Other composting ideas

#### Trench composting

Is another cool method of composting. It can rapidly improve poor soils and increase earthworm activity.



- Dig a trench 300 - 450 mm wide, a spade depth deep, the length of your garden or veggie patch, mounding the soil along the sides of the trench.
- Mix together weeds, twigs, lawn clippings, kitchen scraps etc., and place in the trench and cover with the soil. Water is not usually necessary unless materials are really dry. Continue this process until the row is finished.

#### Compost 'Pockets'

Is a very similar method to trench composting without the trenches. Used mainly for veggie and kitchen scraps, which you can collect in a bucket.

